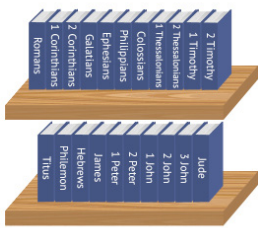


Our Daily Bread Christian University  
This course was developed by  
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### Letters: Instruction



### Epistles: “Letters”



The oldest-known source of the Second Epistle of Peter

### 3. Letters: Instruction

In the city of Corinth, a group of people responded to Paul’s preaching, became Christians, and formed a church. But they were involved in immorality, division, and strife. In Philippi, a discouraged group of believers needed lifting up. In Rome, a loyal band of Christ’s followers needed to clarify their beliefs about righteousness, the Law, and sanctification. They had questions about the Christian’s everyday life. The believers at Thessalonica needed to know about Christ’s return and the last days. In Ephesus, the leaders needed instruction about their position in Christ. Elsewhere, Christians were suffering and didn’t understand why. False teachers were infiltrating churches and threatening to undermine the work. A pastor at Crete needed encouragement.

What was the best way to meet the needs of the growing church? The apostles couldn’t be everywhere at once. So they sent letters (also known as epistles) to explain Christian teaching, to inspire God’s people to holiness, and to tell them how to live.

The churches or individuals who received these letters were no doubt overjoyed when they arrived. They were read aloud to the congregation and passed around from church to church. Copies were made with meticulous care for other churches. Believers began to collect them. All in all, 21 such letters were judged to be inspired, and they became a major portion of the New Testament.

Although there is some history and some biography in these letters, they were primarily written to amplify the teaching of Jesus Christ. Most of them were written either to local bodies of believers (such as those at Corinth or Rome) or to pastors (Timothy and Titus). The age that began at Pentecost is known

as the church age, and these letters talk about church life. Among other things, they give instruction regarding:

- The unity of the church (Ephesians 2:11-22).
- The worship of the church (1 Corinthians 14:26-40).
- The leaders of the church (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1).
- The discipline of the church (1 Timothy 6:3-5).
- The ordinances of the church (1 Corinthians 11:23-30).
- The preaching of the church (2 Timothy 4:2).

Although the epistles were church-centered, they were also useful for individuals. A person with the opportunity to read them would learn the principles to govern his conduct with his fellow believers and before the world. Here's a sample:

- We are to love one another (Romans 12:10).
- We are to submit to government (Romans 13:1).
- We are to imitate Christ (Ephesians 5:1).
- We are to care for one another (1 Corinthians 16:1).
- We are not to speak evil of anyone (Titus 3:2).
- We are to confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

These 21 letters were also written to define and clarify the basic beliefs of Christianity. For example:

- Jesus Christ is God (Colossians 1:13-19).
- The Holy Spirit indwells every believer (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- All are sinners (Romans 3:23).
- Salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- Believers are to forsake sin (Romans 6:1-14).
- Righteousness comes through Christ (Romans 3:21-22).
- The Bible is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16).
- All will be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15).

**Seeing God.** The epistles help us to know God in the following representative ways. As you read these letters, you will see many other elements of God's character.

- In the autobiographical writings of Paul, we see how able God is to supply the deepest needs of those who are willing to serve Him (2 Corinthians 4).
- In the doctrinal portions, we see how careful God has been to provide a rescue that is as right as it is needed (Romans 3:21-26).
- In the comforting passages, we see a God who is able to enter into our pain and care about our struggles (2 Corinthians 1:3-6).
- In the corrective sections, we see a God who not only loves us enough to accept us just the way we are, but loves us so much that He is not willing to leave us the way He found us (Hebrews 12:7-13).
- In the prophetic passages, we see a God who has promised to prepare for us an eternal kingdom where all evil and sin have been removed (2 Peter 3:10-13).

## Revelation: Prophecy



### 4. Revelation: Prophecy

As we have worked through the New Testament, we have seen the story of God's salvation in Christ revealed like the gradual unrolling of a scroll. We have read of great events: the miraculous birth of Christ, His 3 years of public ministry, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection. Rising out of the disappointment of Calvary came the transformed disciples who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, established the church and extended it throughout the world. And the church still lives today, perhaps stronger now than it has been for generations.

But how will it all turn out? What will happen next? What lies ahead for the church—and for the world?

The answers came to John, Jesus' beloved disciple, in a series of dreams and visions. Written down in the book of Revelation in highly figurative language, they set forth the future of the church and all mankind.

**John's Vision of the Past** (Revelation 1–3). John saw Christ, the Head of the church, walking among lampstands that represented seven churches of Asia Minor. To these churches He gave words of approval, accusation, or admonition. Those who endured were promised spiritual reward at Christ's return.

## John's Vision of the Past (Revelation 1–3)



## John's Vision of Heaven

(Revelation 4–5)



John's Vision of Heaven (Revelation 4–5). First he saw the throne of God itself, shimmering in glory and surrounded by worshipers who exalted God for His wonderful creation. When no one was found worthy to open a large scroll, John wept. After he was told to stop weeping, he was given the vision of a slain Lamb (representing Jesus Christ) standing in the center of the throne in heaven. A chorus of praise rang out for the Lamb, who was worthy to open the scroll because He had purchased people with His own blood.

**John's Vision of the Future** (Revelation 6–22). The majority of the book of Revelation deals with future events. This portion may be divided into three general sections: the tribulation (Rev. 6–18), the return of Christ and related events (Rev. 19–20), and a vision of heaven (Rev. 21–22).

## 1. The Tribulation



**1. The Tribulation.** The outpouring of God's wrath was shown in a vision to John in the opening of seven seals, the sounding of seven trumpets, and the outpouring of the contents of seven bowls. Here is what the opening of the seven seals revealed to John:

- 1st seal: a white horse—Antichrist
- 2nd seal: a red horse—war
- 3rd seal: a black horse—famine
- 4th seal: a pale horse—death
- 5th seal: martyred souls and the altar
- 6th seal: earthquakes—destruction
- 7th seal: introduction of the seven trumpets

## 1. The Tribulation



The sounding of the trumpets will usher in terrible devastation on the earth: A third of the vegetation of the earth will be destroyed by hail and fire; a third of the creatures of the sea will be destroyed by a flaming mountain; a third of the rivers will be poisoned by a falling star; a third of the stars and planets will go dark; and a third of earth's population will be killed by a fiendish army of 200 million. Between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets, John saw a vision of an angel with a little book and two witnesses.

God will punish the rebellious nations of the earth. Meanwhile, His enemies, Satan and his henchmen, will gain control of vast segments of the world's population. The earth, reeling with war and death, will be filled with blasphemy and evil.

Then seven bowls filled with God's wrath will be poured out on

## 1. The Tribulation



the earth. One after another, plagues more terrible than ever seen before will fall on the earth. Multitudes of Christians will die as martyrs. And Satan's man, Antichrist, will assemble his armies in Palestine to destroy the Jews.

**2. The Return of Christ.** In this part of John's vision, he saw heaven opened and the Lord Jesus Christ returning to earth in all His glory, surrounded by vast armies. He also saw Antichrist defeated at Armageddon and Satan chained for 1,000 years in the bottomless pit.

After the Jews turn in faith to Jesus Christ as their true Messiah, He will establish His throne in Jerusalem for a 1,000-year reign over the earth in righteousness, prosperity, and peace. When the millennium is over, Satan will be released and will lead a final revolt against the Lord. The rebels will be destroyed by fire from heaven, and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire forever. The earth and heavens as we know them will be destroyed, and they will be replaced by a new heaven and new earth. All unbelievers will be resurrected and judged before a great white throne.

## 3. A Look at Heaven



**3. A Look at Heaven.** John's vision concludes with a grand survey of the new heaven and new earth. The jeweled walls, crystal river, streets of gold, and tree of life will be the believers' eternal home. They will live in the presence of God and their Savior-King, the Lord Jesus Christ, forever.

**Seeing God.** The magnificent yet terrifying visions of Revelation help us to know God better. As you read this book, you will see many truths about God. For example:

- In Christ's messages to the seven churches, we see God's deep concern for the spiritual welfare of His people (Rev. 2–3).
- In the vision of the throne in heaven, we see the majestic, lofty, unlimited glory of God (Rev. 4).
- In the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments, we see God's anger over a sinful and rebellious world (Rev. 6–18).
- In the defeat and banishment of Satan, we see that God has the power to conquer sin and evil (Rev. 19–20).
- In the description of heaven, we see the goodness of God eternally displayed (Rev. 21–22).